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Letter dated 18 August 1998 from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of a paper entitled "Evolution of India's nuclear policy" which the Prime Minister of India presented to the Indian Parliament on 27 May 1998.

I shall be grateful if the text of the present letter and its enclosure could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 72 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Kamalesh **Sharma**

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Annex

Evolution of India's nuclear policy

Paper presented by the Prime Minister of India to the Indian Parliament on 27 May 1998

1. On 11 May 1998, a statement was issued by Government announcing that India had successfully carried out three underground nuclear tests at the Pokhran range. Two days later, after carrying out two more underground sub-kiloton tests, the Government announced the completion of the planned series of tests. The three underground nuclear tests carried out at 1545 hours on 11 May were with three different devices: a fission device, a low-yield sub-kiloton device and a thermonuclear device. The two tests carried out at 1221 hours on 13 May were also low-yield devices in the sub-kiloton range. The results from those tests have been in accordance with the expectations of our scientists.

2. In 1947, when India emerged as a free country to take its rightful place in the comity of nations, the nuclear age had already dawned. Our leaders then took the crucial decision to opt for self-reliance, and freedom of thought and action. We rejected the cold war paradigm whose shadows were already appearing on the horizon and, instead of aligning ourselves with either bloc, chose the more difficult path of non-alignment. This has required the building up of national strength through our own resources, our skills and creativity and the dedication of the people. Among the earliest initiatives taken by our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was the development of science and inculcation of the scientific spirit. It is this initiative that laid the foundation for the achievement of 11 and 13 May, made possible by exemplary cooperation among the scientists from Department of Atomic Energy and the Defence Research and Development Organization. Disarmament was then and continues to be a major plank in our foreign policy now. It was, in essence, and remains still, the natural course for a country that had waged a unique struggle for independence on the basis of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (force of truth).

3. Development of nuclear technology transformed the nature of global security. Our leaders reasoned that nuclear weapons were not weapons of war; these were weapons of mass destruction. A nuclear-weapon-free world would, therefore, enhance not only India's security but also the security of all nations. This is the principal plank of our nuclear policy. In the absence of universal and non-discriminatory disarmament, we cannot accept a regime that creates an arbitrary division between nuclear haves and have-nots. India believes that it is the sovereign right of every nation to make a judgement regarding its supreme national interests and exercise its sovereign choice. We subscribe to the principle of equal and legitimate security interests of nations and consider it a sovereign right. At the same time, our leaders recognized early that nuclear technology offers tremendous potential for economic development, especially for developing countries that are endeavouring to leap across the technology gaps created by long years of colonial exploitation. This thinking was reflected in the enactment of the Atomic Energy Act of 1948, within a year of our independence. All the numerous initiatives taken by us since in the field of nuclear disarmament have been in harmony and in continuation of those early enunciations.

4. In the 1950s, nuclear weapons testing took place above ground and the characteristic mushroom cloud became the visible symbol of the nuclear age. India then took the lead in calling for an end to all nuclear-weapon testing as the first step for ending the nuclear arms race. Addressing the Lok Sabha [lower house of Parliament] on 2 April 1954, shortly after a major hydrogen bomb test had been conducted, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru stated that "nuclear, chemical and biological energy and power should not be used to forge weapons of mass destruction". He called for negotiations for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, and in the interim, a standstill agreement to halt nuclear testing. The world had by then witnessed fewer than 65 tests. Our call was not heeded. In 1963, an agreement was concluded to ban atmospheric testing but by this time, countries had developed the technologies for conducting underground nuclear tests and the nuclear arms race continued unabated. More than three decades passed and after over 2,000 tests had been conducted, a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was opened for signature in 1996, following two and half years of negotiations in which India had participated actively. In its final shape, this Treaty left much to be desired. It was neither comprehensive nor was it related to disarmament.

5. In 1965, along with a small group of non-aligned countries, India had put forward the idea of an international non-proliferation agreement under which the nuclear-weapon States would agree to give up their arsenals provided

that other countries refrained from developing or acquiring such weapons. This balance of rights and obligations was absent when the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons emerged in 1968, almost 30 years ago. In the 1960s, our security concerns deepened. But such was our abhorrence of nuclear weapons and such our desire to avoid acquiring them that we sought instead security guarantees from major nuclear Powers of the world. The countries we turned to for support and understanding felt unable to extend to us the assurances that we then sought. That is when and why India made clear its inability to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

6. The Lok Sabha debated the Non-Proliferation Treaty on 5 April 1968. The then Prime Minister, the late Smt. Indira Gandhi assured the House that "we shall be guided entirely by our self-enlightenment and the considerations of national security". She highlighted the shortcomings of the Non-Proliferation Treaty while re-emphasizing the country's commitment to nuclear disarmament. She warned the House and the country "that not signing the Treaty may bring the nation many difficulties. It may mean the stoppage of aid and stoppage of help. Since we are taking this decision together, we must all be together in facing its consequences." That was a turning point. This House then strengthened the decision of the Government by reflecting a national consensus.

7. Our decision not to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty was in keeping with the basic objective of maintaining freedom of thought and action. In 1974, we demonstrated our nuclear capability. Successive Governments thereafter have continued to take all necessary steps in keeping with that resolve and national will, to safeguard India's nuclear option. This was also the primary reason underlying the 1996 decision for the country not to subscribe to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, a decision that met the unanimous approval of the House yet again. Our perception then was that subscribing to the Treaty would severely limit India's nuclear potential at an unacceptably low level. Our reservations deepened as the Treaty did not also carry forward the nuclear disarmament process. On both counts, therefore, yet again our security concerns remained unaddressed. The then Minister for External Affairs, Shri I. K. Gujral, had made clear the Government's reasoning to this House during the discussions on this subject in 1996.

8. The decades of the 1980s and 1990s meanwhile witnessed the gradual deterioration of our security environment as a result of nuclear and missile proliferation. In our neighbourhood, nuclear weapons increased and more sophisticated delivery systems were inducted. Further, in our region there has come into existence a pattern of clandestine acquisition of nuclear materials, missiles and related technologies. India, in this period, became the victim of externally aided and abetted terrorism, militancy and clandestine war through hired mercenaries.

9. The end of the cold war marks a watershed in the history of the twentieth century. While it has transformed the political landscape of Europe, it has done little to address India's security concerns. The relative order that was arrived at in Europe was not replicated in other parts of the globe.

10. At the global level, there is no evidence yet on the part of the nuclear-weapon States of taking decisive and irreversible steps in moving towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. Instead, the Non-Proliferation Treaty has been extended indefinitely and unconditionally, perpetuating the existence of nuclear weapons in the hands of the five countries that are also permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Some of those countries have doctrines that permit the first use of nuclear weapons; the same countries are also engaged in programmes for the modernization of their nuclear arsenals.

11. Under such circumstances, India was left with little choice. It had to take necessary steps to ensure that the country's nuclear option, developed and safeguarded over decades, was not permitted to erode through a voluntary self-imposed restraint. Indeed, such an erosion would have had an irremediably adverse impact on our security. The Government was thus faced with a difficult decision. The only touchstone that guided it was national security. The tests conducted on 11 and 13 May are a continuation of the policies set into motion that put this country on the path of self-reliance and independence of thought and action. Nevertheless, there are certain moments when the chosen path reaches a fork and a decision has to be made. The year 1968 was one such moment in our nuclear chapter, as were 1974 and 1996. At each of those moments, we took the right decision guided by our national interest and supported by a national consensus. The year 1998 was born in the crucible of earlier decisions and made possible only because those decisions had been taken correctly in the past and in time.

12. At a time when developments in the area of advanced technologies are taking place at a breathtaking pace, new parameters need to be identified, tested and validated in order to ensure that skills remain contemporary and succeeding generations of scientists and engineers are able to build on the work done by their predecessors. The limited series of five tests undertaken by India was precisely such an exercise. It has achieved its stated objective. The data provided by these tests are critical to validate our capabilities in the design of nuclear weapons of different yields for

different applications and different delivery systems. Further, these tests have significantly enhanced the capabilities of our scientists and engineers in computer simulation of new designs and enabled them to undertake subcritical experiments in future, if these are considered necessary. In terms of technical capability, our scientists and engineers have the requisite resources to ensure a credible deterrent.

13. Our policies towards our neighbours and other countries too have not changed; India remains fully committed to the promotion of peace with stability and the resolution of all outstanding issues through bilateral dialogue and negotiations. These tests were not directed against any country; they were intended to reassure the people of India about their security and convey the determination that this Government, like previous Governments, has the capability and resolve to safeguard their national security interests. The Government will continue to remain engaged in substantive dialogue with our neighbours to improve relations and to expand the scope of our interactions in a mutually advantageous manner. Confidence-building is a continuous process; we remain committed to it. Consequent upon the tests and arising from an insufficient appreciation of our security concerns, some countries have been persuaded to take steps that sadden us. We value our bilateral relations. We remain committed to dialogue and reaffirm that the preservation of India's security creates no conflict of interest with these countries.

14. India is a nuclear-weapon State. This is a reality that cannot be denied. It is not a conferment that we seek. Nor is it a status for others to grant. It is an endowment to the nation by our scientists and engineers. It is India's due, the right of one sixth of humankind. Our strengthened capability adds to our sense of responsibility, the responsibility and obligation of power. India, mindful of its international obligations, shall not use these weapons to commit aggression or to mount threats against any country; these are weapons of self-defence and to ensure that, in turn, India is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion. In 1994, we had proposed that India and Pakistan jointly undertake not to be the first to use their nuclear capability against each other. The Government on this occasion reiterates its readiness to discuss a no-first-use agreement with that country, as also with other countries bilaterally, or in a collective forum. India shall not engage in an arms race. India shall also not subscribe to or reinvent the doctrines of the cold war. India remains committed to the basic tenet of our foreign policy – a convention that global elimination of nuclear weapons will enhance its security as well as that of the rest of the world. It will continue to urge countries, particularly other nuclear-weapon States, to adopt measures that would contribute meaningfully to such an objective.

15. A number of initiatives have been taken in the past. In 1978, India proposed negotiations for an international convention that would prohibit the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. This was followed by another initiative in 1982 calling for a "nuclear freeze" – a prohibition on the production of fissile materials for weapons, on the production of nuclear weapons, and related delivery systems. In 1988, we put forward an action plan for the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons within a specified time frame. It is our regret that these proposals did not receive a positive response from other nuclear-weapon States. Had their response been positive, India need not have gone for the current tests. This is where our approach to nuclear weapons is different from others. This difference is the cornerstone of our nuclear doctrine. It is marked by restraint and a striving for the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

16. We will continue to support such initiatives, taken individually or collectively, by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which has continued to attach the highest priority to nuclear disarmament. This was reaffirmed most recently, last week, at the Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, which has "reiterated their call on the Conference on Disarmament to establish, as the highest priority, an ad hoc committee to start in 1998 negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified framework of time, including a nuclear weapons convention". The collective voice of 113 countries members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries reflects an approach to global nuclear disarmament to which India has remained committed. One of the member initiatives to which we attach great importance was the reference to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) resulting in the unanimous declaration from the ICJ, as part of the advisory opinion handed down on 8 July 1996, that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith *and bring to a conclusion* negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control" (emphasis added). India was one of the countries that appealed to the ICJ on this issue. No other nuclear-weapon State has supported this judgment; in fact, they have sought to decry its value. We have been and will continue to be in the forefront of the calls for opening negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention, so that this challenge can be dealt with in the same manner that we have dealt with the scourge of two other weapons of mass destruction: through the

Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. In keeping with our commitment to comprehensive, universal and non-discriminatory approaches to disarmament, India is an original State party to both of these Conventions. Accordingly, India will shortly submit the plan of destruction of its chemical weapons to the international authority, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We fulfil our obligations whenever we have undertaken them.

17. Traditionally, India has been an outward-looking country. Our strong commitment to multilateralism is reflected in our active participation in organizations such as the United Nations. In recent years, in keeping with the new challenges, we have actively promoted regional cooperation – in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation and as a member of the Regional Forum of the Association of South-East Asian Nations. This engagement will also continue. The policies of economic liberalization introduced in recent years have increased our regional and global linkages and the Government shall deepen and strengthen these ties.

18. Our nuclear policy has been marked by restraint and openness. It has not violated any international agreements, either in 1974 or now, in 1998. Our concerns have been made known to our interlocutors in recent years. The restraint exercised for 24 years, after having demonstrated our capability in 1974, is in itself a unique example. Restraint, however, has to arise from strength. It cannot be based upon indecision or doubt. Restraint is valid only when doubts are removed. The series of tests undertaken by India have led to the removal of doubts. The action involved was balanced in that it was the minimum necessary to maintain what is an irreducible component of our national security calculus. This Government's decision has, therefore, to be seen as part of a tradition of restraint that has characterized our policy in the past 50 years.

19. Subsequent to the tests, the Government has already stated that India will now observe a voluntary moratorium and refrain from conducting underground nuclear test explosions. It has also indicated a willingness to move towards a *de jure* formalization of this declaration. The basic obligations of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty have thus been met: to refrain from undertaking nuclear test explosions. This voluntary declaration is intended to convey to the international community the seriousness of our intent for meaningful engagement. Subsequent decisions will be taken after assuring ourselves of the security needs of the country.

20. India has also indicated its readiness to participate in negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on a fissile material cut-off treaty. The basic objective of this treaty is to prohibit the future production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices. India's approach in these negotiations will be to ensure that this treaty emerges as a universal and non-discriminatory treaty, backed by an effective verification mechanism. When we embark upon these negotiations, it shall be in the full confidence of the adequacy and credibility of the nation's weaponized nuclear deterrent.

21. India has maintained effective export controls on nuclear materials as well as related technologies even though we are neither a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty nor a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Nonetheless, India is committed to non-proliferation and the maintenance of stringent export control to ensure that there is no leakage of our indigenously developed know-how and technologies. In fact, India's conduct in this regard has been better than some countries party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

22. India has in the past conveyed our concerns about the inadequacies of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. It has explained that the country was not in a position to join because the regime did not address our country's security concerns. These could have been addressed by moving towards global nuclear disarmament, our preferred approach. As this did not take place, India was obliged to stand aside from the emerging regime so that its freedom of action was not constrained. This is the precise path that has continued to be followed unwaveringly for the last three decades. That same constructive approach will underlie India's dialogue with countries that need to be persuaded of our serious intent and willingness to engage so that mutual concerns are satisfactorily addressed. The challenge to Indian statecraft is balancing and reconciling India's security imperatives with valid international concerns in this regard.

23. The House is aware of the different reactions that have emanated from the people of India and from different parts of the world. The overwhelming support of the citizens of India is a source of strength for the Government. It not only tells that this decision was right but also that the country wants a focused leadership, which attends to national security needs. This the Government pledges to do as a sacred duty. The Government has also been greatly heartened by the outpouring of support from Indians abroad. They have spoken with one voice in favour of the Government's action. The Government conveys its profound gratitude to the citizens of India and to Indians abroad and looks to them for support in the difficult period ahead.

24. In this, the fiftieth year of our independence, India stands at a defining moment in our history. The rationale for the Government's decision is based on the same policy tenets that have guided the country for five decades. These policies were sustained successfully because of the underlying national consensus. The present decision and future actions will continue to reflect a commitment to sensibilities and obligations of an ancient civilization, a sense of responsibility and restraint, but a restraint born of the assurance of action, not of doubts or apprehension. The Gita explains (chap. VI-3), as none other can, that:

> "Action is a process to reach a goal; action may reflect tumult, but when measured and focused, will yield its objective of stability and peace".